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Purchasing Recycled Paper Products

Cities, towns, and other local governmental bodies that have decided to purchase paper and other products made from recycled materials need not hesitate to do so, even if similar non-recycled products are available at a lower price.

We recently learned that some local purchasing officials are hesitant to purchase recycled paper products under statewide contract awarded by the state's Operational Services Division (OSD) because some prices are higher than prices for comparable paper products that do not contain recycled material.

OSD has developed an "Environmentally Preferable Products" (EPP) Program to help promote policies aimed at protecting the environment. Many products that qualify for the EPP designation contain a specific minimum percentage of post-consumer (recycled) content. OSD has determined that some EPPs, including many paper products and plastic trash bags, are available in the marketplace at a value and quality comparable to their non-environmentally preferable counterparts. For this reason, all of the statewide contracts awarded by OSD for these commodities specify EPPs. For example, all printing and writing papers purchased under a statewide contract must contain a minimum of 30 percent recycled content.

Your jurisdiction is free to adopt its own goals for purchasing products made with recycled materials or to purchase EPPs from a statewide contract. Depending on availability, paper products made with recycled materials may at times cost more than their counterparts with no recycled content. However, many products, like the EPPs on OSD's list, are often available at attractive prices.

We recently sampled prices from two very large office supply vendors for 8 ½" X 11" 20 lb. white copier bond to compare the costs of paper with 30 percent recycled content and paper with no recycled content. The price difference was less than 10 percent, and one vendor offered the bond with recycled content at a lower price than comparable paper with no recycled content.

If you are concerned about the possibility of paying higher prices for environmentally preferable products, we recommend that you solicit competitive price quotes from vendors for similar items with and without recycled content. You may very well discover that if you plan ahead and make your purchases when environmentally preferable products are readily available, you can help promote the state's environmental goals without having to pay more for your supplies.